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EDITORIAL NOTES**WHAT IS THE VALUE OF ANYTHING?**

A very great objection to the schedule of fees offered by the associated insurance companies for the services of physicians under the new insurance and compensation act, is the fixing of a flat fee. Fees for professional work cannot be absolutely fixed; as a matter of fact, the value of everything is relative and the old saying of "charging what the traffic will bear" is fundamentally true and right. The freight rate on silk is more per ton than that on pig iron; a lawyer gets a bigger fee for incorporating a fifty million dollar concern than for a thousand dollar company; a surgeon is entitled to a larger fee for removing the appendix of a millionaire than for taking out that of a car conductor. Some of our best surgeons have a system of charging that is based upon the income of the individual and represents one or more month's income for the work to be done, and this seems to be a reasonable and equitable way of fixing the fee. It is foolish for any one to say that it is as much work and strain and responsibility in the case of the poor man as in that of the rich man. Just as much coal is burned in hauling a ton of silk as in pulling a ton of pig iron over a certain distance. Therefore, the contracting to do certain professional work for certain fixed fees, irrespective of the income of the patient, is fundamentally wrong and vicious.

SQUEEZING THE COMPANIES.

Dr. French read a paper on the subject of industrial compensation, insurance, etc., before the Los Angeles County Medical Association and, in the main, took the attitude voiced in your JOURNAL in connection therewith. One point he brought up, however, is new in so far as it has not been mentioned in these pages; that is, the fact that some physicians will try to make the bill unduly large if they know that an insurance company of large capital is going to pay out the money. Probably that is, in a few cases, true. Physicians are average men and probably have but a little more than the average rate of honesty; in every walk of life and in every calling we shall find rascals and dishonest men; occasionally one reads of some clergyman who has been detected leading an immoral or a dissolute life, but because of that we do not condemn all clergy nor do we think of them as all being dissolute. Every practicing physician does a great deal of work for nothing, and the very nature of his calling leads him to try to think more honestly than does the daily occupation of the average man in any other calling; therefore we truly believe that physicians are to some extent more honest in the average than those in other walks of life. But even at that there will be some cases of attempted grafting, no matter what is done. The plan presented in this issue and strongly recommended to county medical societies for their consideration, will, we think, do away with the charge of possible graft. Still, it seems to be a peculiar phase of human nature that every one must try to get "something for nothing," particularly when it is a corporation that is to be depleted. People who would never put a hand in an individual pocket, will avoid paying car-fare if they can, and we all know the predatory instinct that removes things from hotels! Doubtless many physicians who would be perfectly honest with an individual patient would not think it wrong to try to "stick" a corporation. It is a queer people!

A SUGGESTION ABOUT FEES.

Why not carefully consider and present to the various insurance companies a proposition something like the following; it will not only do away with the wrong idea of fixed, flat fees, but it will also do away with the serious harm to a number of physicians which is a result of forcing a certain company physician upon all patients covered by that company. Let the injured person have the attention of any member of the county medical society who will agree to make his charges commensurate with the income of the patient and not try to fix them according to the capital stock of the insurance company. In the event of a dispute

arising between a member of the society and an insurance company, turn the matter over to the county medical society for adjustment. It is more than possible that some physicians would make unfair and too large charges, but it is hardly imaginable that a county society would do anything out of the way or unjust and would not allow an account to be approved if it were obviously too large or dishonest or not commensurate with the income of the patient. This matter has been discussed with the managers of several insurance companies and is entirely satisfactory to them; if it is satisfactory to the various county units and if they will undertake to make the proposition to the insurance companies, doubtless nearly if not quite all of them will be glad to adopt it. One plan that is being followed by at least some of the companies, is exceedingly bad. They contract with one physician to handle all of the work in the state at a fixed amount and he pays local doctors—as little as he can get them to agree to take! Los Angeles has acted wisely in condemning this practice and the Council of that Association has adopted very clear resolutions setting forth their stand in the matter, which resolutions appear elsewhere in these pages.

IMPORTANT BUSINESS.

Not in the last twenty years have so many questions of vital importance to the medical profession and to the members of our society presented themselves as at the present time. They will come up for discussion and for action at the annual meeting next month, and every county society should be represented and every delegate in his place on the night of April 14th (Tuesday) at the Hotel Potter, Santa Barbara. Attacks upon medical men in the form of suits for alleged malpractice have increased enormously and reached serious proportions. Not one such suit was justified and not one was lost by us during the past year. Nor do our attorneys fear that such suits will go against us or be held to stand on appeal. But they cost money and time and trouble to defend, and if they are not carefully studied and defended, and verdicts allowed to go against physicians, there will be a perfect deluge of such actions and our profession will be mulcted of many thousands of dollars. Then we shall have the question of fees under this insurance act and the manner in which practice is diverted, together with the relation of this cheap work to subsequent malpractice suits which the society will have to defend, a most serious question. Should a member who signs this fee contract be allowed to keep his membership, and if he is, should he be defended by the society in case of a suit arising from such work? Do not fail to be at the meeting and let each county unit see to it that it elects delegates who will surely attend. What construction shall be put upon the income tax and how will it affect our relations with our patients? Shall we notify them that the law requires us to sue for an account in order to prove

that it is bad? Shall we establish a credit department in connection with the work of the State Society? There are certainly plenty of very important questions for the House of Delegates to consider.

TUBERCULOSIS; A ROUSING MEETING!

In the advertising pages of this issue will be found a page devoted to some remarks about the tuberculosis situation that are important to all of us and that should be read by all. At the next meeting, Santa Barbara, Thursday, April 16th, the whole day will be devoted to a series of papers by distinguished men dealing with the tuberculosis question. This meeting is arranged by the California Association for the Study and Prevention of Tuberculosis, and it is hoped that it will put new and enthusiastic life into that association and into the members of our society in their relations with the association. Look over the program as published herein.

"WHISPER HIM TO DEATH."

A school teacher in Alameda was charged with misbehavior with girl pupils; there was a thorough investigation and the charge was found to be absolutely groundless. Concerning the matter the San Francisco *Examiner* had this to say: "There was absolutely nothing in the charges, which seem to have been the sole work of a mischief-making and meddlesome female politician, but Principal Cohn will suffer more or less from the undeserved stigma anyhow. Malice finds no accusation so easy to bring and innocence no accusation so hard to dispute as is an accusation of sexual wrongdoing. There are always plenty of evil minds ready to believe the worst imputations of this kind, though made by the meanest malice and with no jot or tittle of truthfulness." The *Examiner* might have gone on and said that the very people who take a delight in circulating such unfounded and dastardly stories know all the time that the stuff they talk and distribute is nothing but lies, lies from beginning to end. Many a man has been ruined by just that sort of thing; a few survive a good deal of it and come out, after the years have gone by, stronger and bigger than they would have been. It is nearly always impossible to find the originator of these whisperings, and so there is nothing to be done in the way of fighting back; to walk straight, look every one in the eye and wait for time to make some of the whisperers ashamed of themselves, is about all the victim can do. Some years ago a physician in this State was completely ruined in this dastardly fashion; more recently it was tried on a prominent physician in a southern city, but he survived, as did two physicians in San Francisco who were also made the objects of such malicious attack. There are no words of contempt too strong to be applied to those who are so loathsome as to pass on this sort of thing; man is the only animal that can become so degraded as to fight in this way.